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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings of a study that examined teachers' and administrators' perceptions of barriers to shared governance or site-based decision making. The eight barriers included ethics, gender bias, political interference, harassment, communication, personal values, cultural diversity, and resources. Data were gathered through a survey of 130 graduate students from 7 education courses at different institutions throughout northwestern Georgia. Respondents were asked to attribute responsibility for the barriers to either faculty or administrators. Seventy-four percent of the sample were involved in some form of shared decision making. Respondents from schools not participating in shared governance showed significantly different opinions from those whose schools were not participants. Personnel from city systems, which are smaller, indicated a joint responsibility toward overcoming the ethics barrier. However, they believed that the administrator was responsible for resource and cultural-diversity barriers. Elementary-school personnel identified the principal as responsible for the barriers of personal values and ethics. Personnel from urban schools said that both faculty and administrators impeded progress in preventing gender bias, promoting cultural diversity, and making resources available. Most faculty defined shared decision making as a process--developing and belonging to teams. However, very few respondents mentioned the curriculum, the students, or the community-at-large as being part of the action. (LMI)

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Cultivating Attitudes for Change

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James McGregor Burns stated that "Leadership is one of the most observed, but least understood phenomena on earth". The effectiveness of school organization and change depends upon the attitude of the administration. Since schools' bureaucracies are deeply entrenched in tradition, change, especially from the top, seems unlikely to be effected without paying a price in the relationships between and among superordinates and subordinates within the organization. Thus, how faculty perceive the quality and knowledge of leadership and any barriers to effective change are important factors to study. Without an understanding of perceived barriers, change or reform within an organization cannot take place in the most superficial of practice. Most school reform and/or restructuring efforts target some form of shared governance/ shared-decision making concept. The purpose of this study was to examine perceived barriers to shared governance or site-based shared decision making.

Methodology

Based on a study of intimidating behaviors of school administrators (Mims & Carr, 1995), a survey questionnaire was developed to determine barriers to shared-decision or site-based decision making. The questionnaire consisted of eight perceived barriers - ethics, gender bias, political interference, harassment, communication, personal values, cultural diversity, and resources. Respondents indicated the level of agreement (Likert scale) as to whom was responsible for each barrier - the faculty or the administrator. Three open-ended questions were included which asked for a definition of shared governance; through what actions and by whom is the concept of shared governance expressed in your school; and through what actions and by whom would you like to see the concept of shared governance

expressed in you school. Demographic information were obtained from each respondent, and the responses were statistically compared by the demographic categories produced for these variables: current position (faculty or administrator), gender, school level (elementary, middle, or high), school location (urban, rural, suburban), school system (city or county), and years of teaching experience (at 5 year intervals). The sample consisted of 130 graduate students from seven education classes (supervision, curriculum, research methods, and school law) held in various sites throughout northwest Georgia.

Although the sample was a convenience sample, the distribution of the demographic variables indicate that it is representative of students enrolled in graduate programs at West Georgia College. Importantly, over half of the students (57%) reported that their school was participating in shared governance. Sample characteristics are (see attached figures):

- 86% faculty and 14% administration;
- 80% female and 20% male;
- 51% elementary, 23% middle, and 26% high school;
- 12% urban, 36% rural, and 52% suburban;
- 88% county and 12% city;
- teaching experience was fairly evenly distributed through the four categories, with a range of 17% (11-15 years) to 30% (0-5 years and 16+ years).

Findings

Two nonparametric statistical procedures were used to test the hypothesis of independence using nominal and ordinal data: the Mann-Whitney test, also known as the Wilcoxon test, and the Kruskal-Willis one-way analysis of variance. The former was used to test the independence of the nominal variables (e.g., position and school system) and the latter for the ordinal variables (e.g., school level, school location,

and years of teaching experience). Content analysis was used to examine the patterning in the responses to the open-ended questions.

Barriers to Shared to Governance

ETHICS

- significant difference between city and county, with city agreeing more than county that both the faculty (M-W U, p<.09) and the administration (M-W U, p<.07) are responsible for this barrier.
- significant difference between school level, with elementary school personnel agreeing more than middle and high that the administrator is responsible for this barrier (K-W, p<.06).
- significant difference between school location, with urban school personnel agreeing more than rural and suburban that the both faculty (K-W, p<.02) and the administration (K-W, p<.006) are responsible for this barrier .

GENDER BIAS

- significant difference between school location, with urban school personnel agreeing more than rural and suburban that both the faculty (K-W, p<.02) and the administration (K-W, p<.01) are responsible for this barrier.

PERSONAL VALUES

- significant difference between school level, with elementary school personnel agreeing more than middle and high that the administrator is responsible for this barrier (K-W, p<.10).

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

- significant difference between faculty and administrator (W U, p<.07), with more faculty agreeing that the party responsible for this barrier is the faculty.
- significant difference between city and county (M-W U,p<.02), with city showing more agreement than county that the administrator is responsible for this barrier.
- significant difference between school location, with urban school personnel agreeing more than rural and suburban that both the faculty(K-W, p<.03) and the administration (K-W, p<.02) are responsible for this barrier .
- significant difference in opinion depending upon number of years taught - those teaching 0-5 years agreed more than 5 or more years taught that the faculty were responsible for this barrier (K-W, p<.04).

RESOURCES

- significant difference between city and county (M-W U,p<.10), with city showing more agreement than county that the administrator is responsible for this barrier.
- significant difference between school location, with urban school personnel agreeing more than rural and suburban that both the faculty(K-W, p<.01) and the administration (K-W, p<.02) are responsible for this barrier .

Respondents whose schools were **not participating in shared governance** *showed statistically significant differences in opinion from those whose schools were participating in shared governance in all barriers, except resources.* Those not participating in shared governance attributed barriers to both

members of the faculty and administration in: ethics, gender bias, harassment, personal values, and cultural diversity. They felt the administrators were more responsible than the faculty for the barriers of political interference and communication.

Definition of shared governance

- Eleven percent (14 of 130) of the students surveyed did not respond or stated that they did not know what shared governance meant.

- Of those responding (N=119), nearly everyone mentioned the defining attributes of rule by faculty, staff and administration:
  - That the decisions made in school are done by the administration and the faculty working together toward a common goal and purpose.
  - The faculty and administrators making decisions and policy together for the school.
  - Shared governance is the school management system whereby everyone involved has ownership. All share in decision making and taking responsibility.
  - Administrator as facilitator. Teachers actively participating in building decisions such as instructional management, etc. Teacher working alongside as team member with administration to accomplish the goals of the school.
- Very few responses included students (n=4 of 119, 3%), parents (n=3 of 119, 3%), or the community (n=3 of 119, 3%) in their definition of shared governance:

- Everyone has a say so in how the school is run, even the students, parents, and community.
- Decision making shared by all in the school, this includes the faculty, administrators, support staff, cafeteria workers, janitorial staff, and students.

Through what actions and by whom is shared governance expressed in your school?

- Thirty-four (26%) of those surveyed did not respond or stated that no actions were being taken with respect to shared governance in their school.
- Seventy-four percent (n=96 of 130) were involved in some form of shared decision making. However, no one described specific actions that were being taken in their school. Rather, they wrote of processes and meetings - school improvement committees, participation in Leadership Teams, Design Teams, or Empowerment Committees. Members of these teams, or those involved in shared governance, typically were the faculty and the administration:
  - Shared governance is done through committee made up of the administrators such as Leadership Team Committee.
  - We have "school improvement committees" that each faculty member is responsible to be on these committees to recommend and follow through on goals established to better the school.

- School improvement teams and executive council (1 member of each of 5 teams and 2 members at large), task forces, agenda for committee meetings set by principal and executive council.
- We have a teacher advisory council which includes a teacher from each team and from the exploratory classes. We discuss various school policies and toss around ideas for new rules or lessening of rules.
- Shared governance is seen through several committees and sub-committees there of. On each committee is at least one administrator and several teachers. All teachers must be on a committee.

- Very few (2 of 96, 2%) specifically mentioned the curriculum:
  - The leadership team meets weekly then in turn with their team (grade level) to share ideas and activities to carry out the curriculum and its enhancement.
  - Our current principal uses joint or shared decision making only in areas concerning the curricular issues.

Through what actions and by whom would you like to see shared governance expressed in your school?

- Thirty-seven (28%) of those surveyed did not respond or stated that they did not know what their school could do to participate in shared governance.
- Seventy-two percent (n=93 of 130) had opinions regarding how they would like to see their school involved in shared decision making. Interestingly, 14% (13 of 93) were satisfied with current efforts in shared governance at their school. The others felt improvements could be made, and the actions they felt should be taken fell into four categories:

1. curriculum, texts, materials, activities, and schedules (12 of 93, 13%);
2. rules (3 of 93, 3%);
3. general school policies and procedures (3 of 93, 3%);
4. discipline (2 of 93, 2%).

Persons who should be responsible for these actions were:

1. teachers, faculty, staff (28 of 93, 30%);
2. both faculty and administration (11 of 93, 12%).

Persons who are perceived as barriers were:

1. state, county, school board (8 of 93, 9%);
2. administration, principal (5 of 93, 5%).

Comments representative of actions and who should be responsible:

- I would like more voice in important school issues (discipline, curriculum, schedules).
- More say so in the texts used on the various grade levels by the teachers, instead of choosing the same textbook company for all grades.
- Curriculum and classroom management. Teaching staff making more decisions concerning policies regarding the above mentioned.
- I would like teachers to be able to enforce their rules and be able to teach what and how they think is best (not same for 200+ students of all different abilities).
- All actions hiring, rules, schedules should be governed by a team. The team should consist of "new" teachers as well as more experienced.
- Faculty and administration working together with less involvement from the central office.
- I would like to see shared decision making by administration and faculty

in regards to curriculum.

County, state, school board as barrier:

- I don't think the problem lies within the school as much as the restrictions set by our county office or the state.
- The county administrators need to give us an even freer hand to do such things as establish a school dress code (uniforms), decide our own yearly schedule or decide if and when we will do standardized testing.

Principal/administration as barrier:

- Head master should earn his salary. Principal should have more say and be heard by the board.
- More actions on the part of the principal. Principal must be willing to share the power.

Conclusions

Responses to the open-ended questions were meaningful and somewhat surprising because of the plethora of literature on shared governance and/or the number of school districts that practice, in various degrees, this concept. It should be noted that city systems are smaller units - usually consisting of no more than 2 or 3 elementary schools, 1 or 2 middle schools and 1 high school.

City school personnel, perhaps because of size, indicate a joint responsibility toward barriers of practicing ethics. However, they believe that the administrator is a barrier to resources and for a lack of cultural diversity which is interesting because there is usually more diversity found within the city limits, and there are often more tax dollars available to schools- especially when the city system is also in

an urban area.

Elementary schools, by nature, are smaller units than most middle schools or high schools, and a "family" atmosphere may account for the fact that elementary school personnel believe the principal is a barrier to personal values and ethics which are closely related.

Of particular interest are the responses from urban areas regarding gender bias, cultural diversity, and resources. Urban school personnel find that **both** the faculty and administration are barriers in these three areas. Knowing, this the implications are that these barriers be addressed, in detail, not only through some method of staff development, but also in college courses.

A summary of the responses to open-ended questions may provide some insights as to how and why faculty perceive barriers to shared governance. Most participants defined Shared-Decision-Making as a process: developing teams, belonging to teams/committees. Very few responses mentioned the curriculum, the students, or the community-at-large as being a part of the actions. Responses regarding how they would like to see shared governance expressed are dealing with procedures, and materials.

IMPLICATIONS:

Until the educational community can get together to fully understand that reform, restructuring, or renewal efforts should impact student achievement, and shared governance should focus on those concerns, there will be barriers to implementation. The focus, perhaps, is not where it belongs.